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On the Common Christian Responsibility Toward Areas of Rapid Social Change

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SOCIAL CHANGE IN AN ASIAN COMMUNITY

By

Empiricus

This statement is from a young theologian who has been living in Asia. In his paper he explores some of the obstacles to the acceptance of social change by the Church in Asia and challenges the theological attitude underlying their argument.

Project papers are intended primarily for the use of consultants and study groups working on these topics. They are issued for information and as a basis of discussion. Comments and additional material on the subject matter of these papers are solicited.

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SOCIAL CHANGE IN AN ASIAN COMMUNITY

(Some notes on the ethical and theological issues)

By Empiricus

This is an attempt to look at the formulation "Rapid Social Change" against the background of a particular community in Asia. What is said applies mainly to one group in Indonesia, though it may have wider applicability. The purpose is not to provide a scientific sociological or anthropological report, but simply to indicate some of the background factors which need to be taken into account when studying the theological issues involved in this topic in a non-Western environment.

I. Social

What is society? What is the basis of community? These are unanswered questions in Indonesia today. And part of the social crisis being faced in Indonesia lies precisely at that point.

The ancient unities were incomplete and fragmentary. The Hindu-Buddhist kingdom in central Java controlled a large area geographically, but its influence was primarily cultural. And when the Moslem advance created a new type of religious unity, even this was superficial and did not radically disrupt the older, local communal ties. Through Western colonialism, the first comprehensive and integrated national community consciousness was formed - by education, by commerce, by political organization. But the amount of Dutch influence differed from region to region. In some of the Eastern islands, such as Ambon, the Western influence was especially powerful, largely through the Christian missionary enterprise. But in other places, for example in Central Java, the Dutch administered the area through the local, traditional rulers such as the Sultan of Jogjakarta, and the old cultural and social life was untouched. Somewhat the same practice was followed in East Sumatra where local political-religious rulers, such as the Sultan of Deli, were used. Finally, in some of the remote areas colonial control was extended at a relatively late date and in rather half-hearted ways: among the Bataks the "civilizing" work was pretty much left to the Germans of the Rhenish Mission and in Moslem Atjeh, in spite of the Athenese War, Dutch colonial control was never fully established. A comparison of the development of Java and Sumatra, for instance, indicates the great contrast in the colonial policies and practices from region to region in the old Netherlands East Indies.

For the anthropologist, the Indonesian chain of islands, with its variety of peoples, languages, cultures and religions, presents something of the dimensions of paradise. However, this bewildering variety presents huge social and political problems in the building up of a unified, national state according to modern standards. The fact that the ancient civilizations in Indonesia succeeded in establishing only the most tenuous ties between all these parts and that the Dutch colonial regime, partly out of necessity and partly out of intention, succeeded only in imposing a political unity from the outside and from the top down, means that the modern Indonesian Republic (only ten

years old) has to create a national community out of cultural, religious, and tribal fragments which have never been fully integrated before.

Ten years after independence, Indonesians are more willing to acknowledge the contributions of the Dutch in the economic, educational and political development of their country; in fact, confronted by the great tensions and difficulties in national reconstruction after the Revolution, there is even a danger of a certain nostalgia for the "old days", when (as even uneducated people on the street such as betjak drivers will tell you) "though salaries were low, a guilder was really able to buy you something". In fact, it may not be too much to say that a certain amount of the anti-Dutch expressions in public statements by Indonesian officials at the present time are prompted by this nostalgia of the ordinary people in the streets who are dissatisfied with the present situation of inflation, social upheaval, and political instability and like to recall the more peaceful and orderly days of the colonial regime.

Nevertheless, whatever the merits and defects of the Dutch colonial government, it never succeeded in creating a real Indonesian unity in a positive way, but only in a negative way. That is, it was really through the rallying of nationalistic forces for independence against the Dutch control that dynamic social forces from within Indonesia were united. And in a unique and unprecedented way, the Revolution brought Indonesians together as one people. In the common struggle for independence and under the common motto of "Merdeka" ("Liberty"), the old communal, religious and cultural differences were submerged. A new vision of a national unitary society was born.

However, the old differences were not permanently submerged as many had hoped and expected. The Revolution was the fire which fused Indonesia together in a political way. It had, naturally, cultural and social effects as well. It helped to create a spirit of unity among the Indonesian people. Furthermore, it broke down some of the feudalistic inhibitions and social restrictions of the old order, both indigenous and colonial. During the Revolution soldiers from Sumatra and Java fought side by side; Christians and Moslems became brothers under one flag and served one cause.

Even so, today it is becoming apparent that this revolutionary unity was based on a particular act of circumstances created by the political struggle for freedom. Having achieved its immediate goal, the Revolution begins to lose its momentum: As in many of the other newly independent countries, the period of post-revolutionary "hangover" sets in and the spirit of disillusionment is widespread. The unity created in the actual military and political struggle against the foreign colonial power, begins to weaken and disintegrate when success is achieved. The ancient communal, religious and cultural patterns begin to re-emerge. It can be seen in many ways. During the Revolution the familiar slang form of address is commonly used: "Bung" ("Brother"), even to the President and other high ranking persons. Today it is still heard, but much less often, and more formal titles are used; manual labourers in Medan even call one another "Mijn Heer", the old "colonial" Dutch form. Immediately after the Revolution there were signs in government offices that to speak Dutch was disloyal (most educated Indonesian officials having studied in Dutch) and that the national language, Bahasa Indonesian, should be used; today, two educated Indonesians may begin their conversation in Indonesian but it will likely revert to Dutch after the first formal greetings. In a small village in Sumatra the old traditional method of seating at feasts according to the

persons' social status was abandoned during the Revolution for more democratic methods; now the old hierarchical system has been restored. In a similar village, the economically burdensome custom of giving feasts according to the "adat" (the customary law) which had been abandoned, is now restored and the social obligations neglected during the Revolution are now being made up retroactively. The old paternal pattern of arranged marriages is reinforced; a young educated Indonesian is not able to find a suitable wife because the nurse that he has chosen proves to be of the former Batak slave caste and is therefore unacceptable to his parents. In the military cemetery in Medan, Moslem and Christian graves lie side by side; today, the younger brothers of these revolutionary heroes have forgotten the common struggle and two are killed in a fight between Atjehnese and Batak schoolboys; and many Chinese fear to go out on the streets of Medan or Siantar at night because of the growing anti-Chinese feelings. The Dutch proposals for an Indonesia united on a federal system are bitterly rejected during the Indonesian-Dutch peace negotiations; today, the fanatical Moslem groups of the Darul Islam carry on terrorist activities and fight against government troops in a campaign for a theocratic Moslem state and have set up almost completely autonomous Islamic states in the Celebes and in northern Sumatra.

These random illustrations may indicate that the Revolution was really only a first step in Indonesian unification and that social unity has hardly even achieved the status of an ideal. In the face of this resurgence of old communalism and separatism, Indonesian political leaders appeal to their people "to complete the Revolution". The fact is, however, that the ideological force of the Revolution has been spent and the assertion that there should be unity because "the Revolution is not yet finished" gains little response. Only recently in Djakarta, there was a large meeting of people of Sumatra - Bataks, Atjehnese, Minangkabau, and others -- to press the claims of Sumatra for a greater share of the national budget and for additional programs of government assistance. For a Javanese from Djakarta, for example, to approach this group and plead for unity in the name of the Revolution carries very little weight. And the same has been true of the government's attempts to deal with the Darul Islam.

The fact is that nationalism, even newly-born nationalism, has a limited cohesive power and provides only a partial foundation for the social unity of a country. This is part of the crisis which Indonesia faces today and the same is true of some of its neighbours such as India, Ceylon, Burma, Indo-China and the Philippines.

In this situation, an answer to the question "What is society"? is of the utmost <u>practical</u> urgency. A country such as Indonesia desperately needs a new ideological basis for the period of national reconstruction and social unification which it is facing. The ideological perplexity of the P.N.I. (Nationalist Party, of which President Sukarno is the real leader in an ideological sense) is very similar to the uncertainty of the Congress Party in India as it faces much the same problems and comes out of a similar background. The P.N.I. was the spearhead of the struggle for independence: but what does it stand for when independence is attained? The Socialist Party has more ideological resources but it is a party of the intellectuals and because of its lack of popular support is nearly wiped out in the General Elections. In this milieu the extreme Moslem groups and the Communists have a strong position. They have some clear ideas of what Indonesia should be and they have simple and understandable answers to this question "What is society"?

One might expect the same to be true of the Christians, but it does not seem to be the case. For one thing, though there is Parkindo, the Christian Party, Christian leaders have divided themselves among several parties. Though this has its advantages, from an ideological point of view the Christian community does not offer any clear-cut answers or occupy a well-defined ideological position. As a minority party, Parkindo has a strategic position in the delicately balanced political situation in Indonesia; but here again, this also makes Parkindo, and the Christian community as a whole, hesitant to place itself too definitely on either side of the power struggle. On the whole, the only ideological theme which the Christians dwell on is that of religious liberty. This reflects a somewhat defensive attitude (not untypical of Indonesian Christianity) which carries behind it perhaps the somewhat questionable theological idea of religious co-existence. In any case, neither Parkindo nor the Christian community as a whole has really thought very deeply about social questions and are certainly in no position at the moment to offer any creative ideas to the answering of this question: "What is society"?

This weakness in the Christian political witness can be traced back to a fundamental weakness in the Indonesian churches themselves. On the one hand, for example, coming out of a pietistic, a political German mission background, a body such as the Batak Church in Sumatra (the largest of the independent national churches in the Far East) has been nurtured on a theology which makes the traditional division between the "Two Kingdoms" and therefore has never developed a distinctive Christian social ethic. On the other hand, most of the Indonesian churches are of the "folks-church" type, their members coming from one cultural and ethnic group. They have, therefore, little experience of the universality of the Christian Body and have not yet been faced with the problem of creating a unity out of "Jew and Greek" elements. Theologically they have not had to apply themselves, even in their own life, to the problems of social reconciliation. As a result, they have not felt particularly concerned with the social crisis which Indonesia faces on the national level.

When a group of theological students in an Indonesian seminary were asked how a Christian decided what was right and wrong in his social relations, they almost all answered "by the adat" - that is, by tradition. This is probably the answer that most Indonesians would give to the question, but it was revealing that a group of Christians should say the same. It reveals that the idea of Christianity producing a distinctive social ethic, or indeed a social ethic at all, is something new to the Indonesian churches.

Another question which this same group of theological students found difficult to answer was: "Who is your neighbour"? In a society with a strong tribal consciousness and powerful family ties, it is not strange that the"neighbour" is sometimes thought of in very limited communal terms. Here again, the churches have only begun to broaden their vision of the social dimensions of the Christian fellowship and the social implications of those dimensions.

It is, therefore, not surprising that in churches where questions such as: "How do I know what is right and wrong?" and "Who is my neighbour"? are only beginning to be asked, the broader national question of "What is society?" has not yet been answered. It may be added, however, that perhaps many churches in the West are too easily presuming to answer the latter questions without ever having fully come to grips with these prior ones in their own life. The failings of the Indonesian Christians are certainly not unique in this field!

II. Change

The question of Rapid Social Change is such a perplexing one for the Indonesian churches (or for the country as a whole for that matter) not only because there are unanswered questions about the nature of society but also because there are so many unanswered questions about change itself. The present generation is caught between two views of change and they are diametrically opposed: change is absolutely bad is one viewpoint; the other, change is absolutely good. The reason for this radical difference is quite easy to explain. Indonesian society is fundamentally static. It is based upon tradition -- the adat or customary law to be specific. There are some mechanics of change within it: for example, in certain tribes the adat for marriage such as prohibitions against marrying one's close relatives may be waived by holding a feast under certain prescribed rules in which this is announced. There are other examples of such provisions for change within the adat. Nevertheless, these are exceptions and change comes only painfully and at considerable cost, e.g. a feast which almost amounts to a communal bribe. In general one may say that the adat reflects, protects, and undergirds the status quo.

Against this background it is understandable why change as change is suspect within a traditional Indonesian community. What the change is becomes less important than the fact of change itself. I once had the opportunity of giving a talk on "The Theology of Change" to a group of Indonesian pastors. Afterwards, one of the students who had assisted me with the translation of it into Indonesian, said that 75% of the group disagreed with me. From what I could discover from discussing it with him and in my own talks with some of those present it was clear that the opposition was not based so much on the fact that it was a bad speech (it may have been that) or that it contained bad theology, but on the fact that I seemed to be taking a positive view of change. In brief, I believed change was good and they believed it was bad. (In fact, I had actually suggested only that change could be good from a Christian standpoint but that subtle distinction apparently escaped them, or it may have seemed irrelevant). Change to them -- and as a group of largely rural and village pastors they probably fairly accurately reflect their social environment -- is bad and though it may come through force of circumstances or by fate, it should be resisted.

The Church in this situation has become the bulwark of conservatism by giving the adat Christian authority. A quite simple but striking example of this is the practice of the Church to excommunicate those who have transgressed the social adat regarding marriage: a girl and boy who marry without following the prescribed forms of adat in choosing a marriage partner or in other respects are read out of the Church. They may be readmitted at a later time, usually at the time of the birth of the first child, but the identification of the adat with Christian ethics and even ecclesiastical law has obviously been carried fairly far. Incidentally, it is interesting that some couples are now eloping for economic reasons. The demands of the adat in

terms of social gatherings and feasts become so prohibitive for some of the poorer people that parents actually tacitly agree to their children eloping: but even in these cases the Church maintains its practice of excommunication. On the island of Nias off the west coast of Sumatra the bride price system has become so intolerable that many young men are permanently barred from marriage and this is in a society where over 80% of the population are Christian! In such a situation the Church has recognized the evil of the adat in this instance, but it has been completely impotent to change it -- the reason why it has been impotent is partially because change itself is feared, even change for the better.

Among many of the younger generation, particularly those who have education or who have studied away from their home community, perhaps abroad, there is a reaction. But this reaction is sometimes so sharp and complete that it is not constructive: it does not really help to bring change. That in itself may show that they still remain under the dominion of the adat to the extent that they assume that change is impossible within it and only by a complete break can it be achieved. In any case, the elders still rule, as is customary in eastern society, and change for them is the enemy. One of the church leaders in one area gave an interesting talk, which was later reprinted in the church paper, on social ethics. Two of his main points were: 1. the evil of the blouses made of you-can-see-through-material (nylon!) and 2. the evil of two people riding on the same bicycle (a girl riding on the back of a boy's bicycle.) The person who gave this talk was not notoriously conservative: I had heard him tell with some humour about his experience as a young pastor in a village where he had run along the street to get out of a sudden rainstorm and was ticked off by some of his parishoners because "it was not customary for pastors to run". The point is that when the Church itself has not really thought through the problem of change it tends to express its prophetic function in the social sphere almost entirely in relation to petty issues such as nylon blouses. Straining at knats and swallowing camels becomes a regular part of the diet.

The fact that the churches have on the whole failed to come to terms with the problem of change is potentially dangerous as well as actually tragic. For while Indonesian society in the villages and in the rural areas is conservative and traditional, Indonesia as a nation is a product of revolution. Change brought it into being. Fortunately, for their own future, the Indonesian churches played a positive and active role in the revolution. Rows of crosses match rows of Moslem markers in military cemeteries. They are a permanent memorial, and one hopes a guarantee, of the national identification of the Christian community.

The tragedy today is that the churches seemed to have participated in the revolution spontaneously and without theological reflection. Considering the chaotic circumstances, it is not surprising. Today, however, the more difficult stage of revolution is being

experienced - reevaluation, reconstruction, reassessment. For those who were simply swept along by the course of events, or by emotional spontaneity, or by other unreflective means, this period all too easy becomes a time of reaction. Over against the cry of nationalist politicians that "the revolution is not yet finished" there are those who respond "it is finished and a good thing it is".

The spirit of revolution is: all change is good. The spirit of the adat is: all change is bad. Indonesia today is torn by that tension. During one of the military uprisings a student somewhat plaintively said to me: "We know nothing about evolution, only revolution". The only real experience of gradual change which Indonesia has known has come through colonialism. That, of course, is change imposed from the outside. It is perhaps for this reason more than any other that one finds a certain nostalgia -- usually deeply camouflaged -- for the colonial time among certain Indonesians, especially the intellectuals. An Indonesian politician in Djakarta will make a violent speech against Dutch colonialism and immediately afterwards drive to a Dutch school to pick up his children. Incongruous? Yes. But understandable. An Indonesian will go into a government office to talk to an Indonesian official. On the wall there will be a slogan to use only the Indonesian language. The first words of greeting will be Indonesian but when they get down to business they will likely be talking Dutch. Incongruous but understandable.

The incongruity of the whole of Indonesian life today can be understood as this deep, spiritual struggle with the problem of change. And when it is understood as such, the crucial role of the churches may be appreciated. Does one have to accept either the extreme of sterile and static rejection of change or the extreme of dynamic and destructive acceptance of change? Is there not some spiritual undergirding for the process of gradual and constructive change which the Christian gospel uniquely provides? That is the issue which the churches in Indonesia must seriously face. Unless they do so they will either be swept uncritically along in the fiery stream of revolution or they will be left behind in the stagnant backwaters of reaction. For unless the dynamics of gradual change are realized within Indonesian society, and the churches play a crucial role in bringing them into being, change will come but it will be increasingly destructive and demonic and most likely imposed from without and the Christian community will have lost its chance to determine whether that change will be one which will open the way for its expansion or one which will enclose it and condemn it to permanent imprisonment or even extinction.

III. Theological

The world is changing and the communities of Asia and areas of rapid social change. But the way many Christians in Asia speak would indicate that they are not pleased about it. Is there something in the Christian faith which makes so many Christians and churches in Asia and elsewhere reluctant to face the consequences of change? Is it because they believe in a God "who changeth not", that many Christians think that any kind of change must be bad. To such Christians change is necessarily against the will of God. Perhaps that is why we find so many churches which are afraid of change. The Christian concern with various "modern currents" of change frequently reflects this fearful attitude. Many Christians are interested in these so-called modern currents primarily because they are afraid that such currents may be threatening their Christian faith or endangering the life of the Church. Some of these currents may indeed be dangerous and they cannot be ignored. But too often Christians are merely negative about them when they should be seen in a positive way. But if we believe that "Jesus Christ is Lord" and "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth", and if we accept the words of the Psalmist that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof", then we as Christians cannot be negative about the revolutionary movements of our time. We believe that God has something to do with these "modern currents", and while the powers of evil are great, the powers of God are greater. Change can be for the worse, but it can also be for the better. For Christians in the midst of rapid social change, we very much need a "theology for revolution", that is, we must try to see the revolutionary ferment affecting our homes, our villages, our countries, indeed the whole of world civilization, in a theological perspective. It is not good enough to moralize about them. As Christians in such areas of rapid change we must try to see how these changes are related to the central beliefs of our Christian faith.

Moreover if people first see that the Church has no theological explanation of the significance and meaning of the changes they see taking place around them, they will ask if "God is dead", and the Church will have no answer. What is our "Theology of Revolution"? How can we present through the study of rapid social change the Gospel of the Living God to those who are tempted to believe that God is dead?

There are many revolutionary "modern currents" which are upsetting the lives of Christian people in the villages and towns of Asia. I will limit myself to only two as examples of the problem we face in providing a theological explanation of the developments. Among Christians in Indonesia (as indeed throughout the whole world) there is much negative criticism of secularism and materialism as two modern spiritual currents. It is hard for them to see that the Christian is not permitted only to say No and that to these and similar currents there is an ultimate Yes which is found in Jesus Christ.

1. Secularism

In a country like Indonesia it is understandable that Christians should automatically be against secularism. Many Christian young people are losing interest in the activities of the church; they are turning to the cinemas and cafes for entertainment; men and women leave their Christian homes and go to the big cities, and there lose all contact with the church. These things we call the evil effects of secularism.

We can sympathize with a church which wants to say a very strong No to all this. It is difficult to explain that the church cannot only say No to secularism and to show how in certain respects, and from a Protestant point of view, it is a good thing. Just as in the medieval period of European society, there was a spiritual struggle between the totalitarian spiritual dictatorship of medieval Catholicism which sought to dominate all aspects of life and indeed the whole of civilization, and the views of Luther and his fellow reformers, who fought for the right of certain areas of life to be free from direct interference from the official Church, so today there is a similar spiritual struggle in Asia. Luther in his social ethics really believed in a kind of limited secularism, but this did not mean that the Church should have no influence in secular life. His doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers implies a kind of Christian Secularism.

In primitive religion, there is no such thing as secularism. All parts of life are tied in with religious sanctions and controls, from the planting of rice to the marriage regulations. To a certain extent the old Batak "adat" represents this type of totalitarian religious outlook. With the coming of Christianity, this traditional outlook was baptized into the Church. In a rural, small-village society it was almost inevitable that this should happen. But today life is changing. Christian communities are now found in large cities. Even in the countryside and village, more and more parts of life are given over to government - that is, secular - control; both the educating of children and the selling of rice, for example, are outside of the direct "religious" control of the Church. These are symptoms of a general movement: for instance, the "adat", which formerly covered all of the possible social and ethical problems of the individual in the small community, is no longer relevant for many of the most difficult decisions which a modern Indonesian Christian must make, such as, which political party to join or which candidate to vote for. This current of secularism is inevitable. Nothing the church can do will be able to withstand it. The whole complex development of political, social and economic affairs means that the Church can no longer exercise direct control over these areas of life - as it once did in the small rural community.

What, then, must the Church do in this situation? It means that Christian influence in society must be brought by individual Christians in their secular vocations and not by the church as a dominating political institution or as a social pressure group. The Christian community must recognize the integrity of the secular spheres of life: the right and necessity for the State to be free from direct "religious" control, the right and necessity for economic affairs to be carried on free from ecclesiastical pressures.

One can understand the Moslem fear of secularism because of their theocratic political ideals. In a sense, Islam must say only No to secularism. But Christians can say Yes, not because secularism in itself is good, but because Christians have the confidence that secularism provides the freedom for both evangelism and service through individual Christian witness in all areas of life.

And also, in a deeper sense, Christians can say Yes to secularism, because it is the world and not the Church which is the ultimate object of God's love: "God so loved the world...." In other words, even in its rebellious and sinful state, the world - that is, the secular - is a part of God's creation, and does not depend upon the grace of the Church for its continuance and

preservation. Both the world and the Church are areas of God's redemptive activity. Secularism may be a reminder to the Church that it is not just the Chosen People, but the whole of mankind, which is the proper object of the love of God.

2. Materialism

Materialism is another modern current which is causing a certain amount of anxiety to the churches in Indonesia, as in other areas of rapid change.

It is very easy to see the reason for the No which our Christians say to materialism. After all, it represents that spiritual trend which seems to say that the only ultimate values in life are the material ones. Man is measured by what he eats and drinks. The Christian rejection of this doctrine is perhaps strengthened by the strong reaction to the doctrinaire, anti-religious, anti-ethical character of materialism in its extreme Marxist communist form. A No from the Christian seems almost axiomatic. Yet even here there is need for a Christian Yes which must be theologically explained.

In a deep sense, materialism represents a Christian truth, even though that truth has become twisted, distorted and perverted. The truth of materialism is that God has created both heaven and earth. God does not just inhabit a spiritual other-worldly realm, unrelated to the concrete realities of the world. Not only today but many times in the past, the Church has been guilty of this kind of false spiritualizing of the Christian message. A theology of the Incarnation - the Word become flesh - is as hostile to pure spiritualism as it is to pure materialism.

The Yes of the Christian to materialism is the recognition that the material world is not utterly and absolutely evil, that it has been created by God, and that, even alienated by sin, that material creation is good.

But what is the content of that Yes? The church, particularly in areas of rapid change must show that it is not only concerned for men's souls. It is concerned for the whole man - body and soul - and, therefore, for man's social, political and economic life. The idea that the church can preach to men on Sunday and not care what happens to them during the rest of the week is a heresy. In this sense, there is no such thing as a separate "spiritual sphere" as distinct from the "material sphere".

Frequently we have in our churches in Asia that vague spiritualized conception of the Gospel and good Christians wonder whether the church has a right to say anything about political, social or economic matters. If there had been no Incarnation the answer might possibly be No. But there has been the Incarnation, and therefore the church must have a social ethic.

It is particularly important for our churches in the midst of rapid change, where the growth of Communism is so evident, to understand that materialism has flourished because the church has often neglected its social responsibilities. Men go to the political parties, to the labour unions, and to other groups which are concerned about their material welfare. The church says we will take care of your spiritual needs; your material needs are your own business, and by so doing, it fails to preach the full Gospel. It is true to say, therefore, that Marxist Communism is itself often a judgment on the failure of the Christian Church to understand the nature of the Gospel given to it. And so the Communist has preached a new gospel of materialism, the part of the true Gospel which the churches have so often failed to preach.

Secularism and materialism are only two of the modern currents at work in areas of rapid social change. But they illustrate the problem which our churches face in developing a theology of change. The church all too often becomes a purely conservative and reactionary force in the world. It becomes the stronghold of the old ways and the old orders. It knows only how to say No to the changes which take place around it, rather than learning to say Yes in Jesus Christ.

It is because of this reactionary tendency of the Church in many areas of rapid social change that we are in danger of losing the younger generation in the time of revolution. The church fails to keep up with the times, and it is soon left behind even by its members. The first to go will be the youth. But they are the strength of the future. And that is why we must be concerned with this question now before it is too late.

What we must emphasize in the theological area of this study of rapid social change is that the Christian Gospel is itself an instrument of change. The Gospel of Christ is a Gospel of revolution. There is therefore no need for the Christian to be afraid of change. There has never been anything like the Christian Gospel to bring changes in the world. When Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica it was reported of them: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also". That is the correct description of Christians who are driven by the Gospel of Christ: men who turn the world upside down!

The more we examine the modern currents of change the more we find evidence that most of them are Christian in origin. It is true that they have often become changed and perverted from their original source. Yet, even distorted, they still represent elements of truth which the churches have unfortunately all too often forgotten and neglected. And above all they are living symbols of the revolutionary character of the Gospel. We as Christians are disturbed by modern nationalism but would it have come about except for the struggles for Christian freedom throughout the centuries. If we think of Islam we may recall that it certainly would not exist without the Gospel, because it is a Jewish-Christian offshoot. And Communism is a Christian heresy. When Christians become disturbed by the changes going on round about them, they may discover that in fact it is our own Gospel which is the real source of these changes! Life means change. And if Christ is life, He is also change.

Today many Christians in Asia are searching for the meaning of these changes for their own Christian lives. They seek to understand how they personally can meet these currents of change in their spiritual pilgrimage. As with Christians in other areas of the world when faced with change there is a temptation to crawl into a religious shell. Sometimes we are so overwhelmed by all the changes of this revolutionary world that we would like to turn our backs and make of the church a refuge from change. "At least the Church is always the same." But that is wrong. It is Christ who never changes, and that is a different matter.

In Christ we are always in the process of transformation. That is the "theology of revolution" in personal and social terms. Indeed, what could be more revolutionary than to be "born again". None of us has the power to stand alone against the revolutionary forces of our time. They often threaten to crush us, and perhaps they may yet do so. In a time of revolution, the Christian Church must face that possibility. But can we demonstrate how even

that change - the change of defeat and disaster - can become a Yes when its final resolution is left in the hands of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, death itself for a Christian is a change which alone can reveal that God raises from the dead: so Paul writes his friends in Corinth: "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experience in Asia for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead."

This is the Gospel of Revolution. Perhaps the revolutionary change of our day is necessary if we are once again to discover it.